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SUBJECT: LUKASHENKO NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS - 2007 A BAD YEAR,
FEW PROMISES FOR 2008

REF: A. 07 MINSK 008

[B](#). 07 MINSK 1064

[C](#). 07 MINSK 949

[D](#). 07 MINSK 458

Summary

[1](#). (SBU) Lukashenko's 2007 New Year's Eve address -- by far his most widely viewed speech each year -- stressed his perennial themes of security and economic development despite threats from abroad. In contrast with last year, however, Lukashenko presented threats to Belarus as originating almost exclusively in the West. End summary.

2007 Most Difficult in Nation's History Due to Enemies ...

[2](#). (U) Lukashenko's bluntest statement was a characterization of 2007 as "the most complicated in the history of our young state" followed by references to "sanctions, torrents of lies and disinformation." With no sense of irony, the dictator claimed that "leaders of several countries, in order to draw attention away from their problems, suddenly became worried about the situation in Belarus." He argued that attempts at foreign democratization lead to "endless political intrigue, corruption, economic collapse and destruction."

[3](#). (U) While Lukashenko mentioned the rise in energy prices, he refrained from pointing a finger at Russia (unlike his previous New Year's address (ref A)). In contrast to vitriolic remarks December 30 (ref B), he did not name the United States or in his address, but mentioned that the countries pressuring Belarus were the same ones that intervened in Iraq, Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia. He said that those who wished Belarus ill merely pushed Belarus towards further unity and strengthened its independence.

... But 2007 Achievements Over Fulfill the Five-Year Plan

[4](#). (U) Lukashenko's review of Belarusian achievements in 2007 covered familiar territory -- technical innovation, the harvest, the birth rate, etc. Lukashenko noted an increased birth rate in 2006 in passing during his previous New Years address. This year's address devoted significant attention to the topic, wavering from folksy "heartfelt gratitude to our wonderful women" to the bureaucratic pronouncement that "we already achieved the birth rate level which was only forecast for the end of the current five-year plan (2010)."

(Note: Demographers note the increased rate results merely from the increased number of women of childbearing age in the population (ref C). End note.) Unlike last year, Lukashenko did not mention Belarus' successes combating trafficking in persons and trans-national crime.

15. (U) In international relations, Lukasehnko praised Belarus' "multi-vector" foreign policy. He noted Venezuela, China and Iran by name in extolling Belarus' increased foreign trade and investment. The Non-Aligned Movement, in contrast to 2006, did not merit Lukashenko's attention.

2008: The State Is Not Santa Claus

16. (U) Introducing plans for 2008, Lukashenko quipped that "of course, the state is not Grandfather Frost (the Soviet version of Santa Claus), who can bring gifts and promises." Lukashenko proclaimed 2008 the year of health, and said efforts must be strengthened to develop medicine, education, sport, healthy lifestyles, the environment and moral values. Other proclamations, none of them new, seemed designed to mute criticism. Without mentioning cuts to social benefits (ref D), he claimed no one in need would go without government assistance. He promised to create favorable conditions for private business, but offered no specifics. Lukashenko also said 2008 would see improvements in housing and rural development. (Comment: It is no surprise that there was no reference to 2008 elections for his rubber-stamp parliament. End comment.)

Comment: Just Cosmetic Adjustments for 2008?

17. (SBU) Lukashenko chose a formal setting for the

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presentation, speaking from behind his office desk rather than next to his fireplace as he did in 2006. The move, combined with assertions from his staff that Lukashenko would work throughout the New Year holiday, suggests the regime recognizes a need to counteract rising perceptions that the government has run out of momentum. However, apart from dropping the anti-Russian rhetoric, the content of the address differed little from last year. Most Belarusians, no matter how few glasses of sparkling wine they had consumed, are unlikely to remember anything from this address to distinguish it from ones of New Year's Eves past.

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